

## **Workshop: Political transformative experience: where we are now**

Online (Saint Louis University), May 6, 9:50-5 PM (all times are Central Time Zone)

9:50 – 10:00 AM Introduction by Helen De Cruz (organizer)

10:00 – 11:00 AM Kyle Whyte

### **Political Transformative Experience and Time**

Indigenous studies, among other fields, has, as one of its contributions, certainly noted that U.S. and other settler populations have failed to transform politically. This is despite the confidence that many living persons have that they are certainly far improved in their orientation toward justice from the colonial, patriarchal, capitalist, and ableist intentions and actions of their ancestors. Yet issues of environmental justice, especially regarding climate change, provide evidence affirming that transformation is yet to have occurred, given ongoing threats to Indigenous peoples' rights, livelihoods, cultural maintenance, and political self-determination. The presentation discusses how a huge challenge to transformation is a taken-for-granted crisis thinking about climate change that is connected to linear assumptions about the flow of time. Crisis oriented thinking may engender the illusion of the possibility and achievement of transformation, thereby erasing the continuance of norms underwriting inequity and injustice.

11:10 – 12:10 PM Olúfẹmi O. Táíwò

### **Protect Yourself At All Times: Self Defense and the Construction of Agency**

The role of self-defense as an intervention into one's personality and politics, particularly in the forms of martial arts training and gun ownership, has long been a source of cultural fascination. The common wisdom is onto something: defending one's self from an aggressor is deeply transformative. This talk will survey themes from a long history of attention to the transformative nature of self-defense in African-American political thought, focusing on the themes of armed combat (Robert Williams' *Negroes with Guns* and Akinyele Umoja's *We Will Shoot Back*) and food sovereignty (Fannie Lou Hamer and the Freedom Farm Cooperative).

12:10 – 1:40 PM Lunch break

1:40 – 2:40 PM Meena Krishnamurthy

## **Martin Luther King, Jr. on How to Transform Fear into Fearlessness**

Drawing on my book, *The Emotions of Nonviolence*, I argue that King's famous "Letter from Birmingham Jail" is not merely a justification of civil disobedience but is also and perhaps even primarily an essay on political motivation. It aims to address a central problem in democratic theory: namely, how can and ought we motivate the (racially) oppressed to engage in civil disobedience or, as King called it, nonviolent direct action. King's answer is that we must appeal to the political emotions, both positive and negative. In this chapter, I discuss how fear can stand in the way of political action and how King hoped to transform fear into fearlessness.

2:50 – 3:50 PM Johnathan Flowers

## **Trust, Experience, and Political Transformation**

While the role of affect in political processes has been a crucial element of philosophies of liberation, this paper aims to situate "politically transformative experiences" as affective experiences in which the experiencer and the social environment are transformed such that a new orientation to the world is adopted. Drawing on the work of John Dewey, this paper will situate "the political" as a quality that can be located within experience and it is the intensification of this quality in experiences that allows them to be called "political." Thus, politically transformative experiences need not occur within a defined sphere of the "political."

Accordingly, this paper will argue that *affective political experiences* are necessary to enable what Paulo Freriere describes as a conversion process which terminates in the ability for the oppressor to trust the experience of the oppressed. Politically transformative experiences interrupt the ongoing experience of the oppressor within the situation of oppression, thereby requiring them to adopt a new relation with the oppressed. Thus, the process of conversion from oppressor to the genuine convert who enters communion with the oppressed is one triggered by affective experience.

However, like all experience, the situation of oppression conditions the modes whereby politically transformative experiences are had. For both Freriere and Dewey, the situation in which experience had serves to structure how an experience can be resolved. As such, this paper will then conclude with some brief remarks on the social organization of our ability to *have* and *undergo* experience as a limiting factor in the capacity to be transformed politically by experience.

4:00 – 5:00 PM Krushil Watene

## **Indigenous Peoples and Intergenerational Justice**

Abstract TBA